DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 212 957 CG 015 751

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TITLE Influence of Female Role Models on Career-Related Attitudes.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association (52nd, New York, NY, April 22-25, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Change; Career Choice; College Freshmen; Faculty Advisers; *Females; Higher Education; *Nontraditional Occupations; *Occupational Aspiration; *Role Models; Role Perception; *Self Esteem; Sex Role; *Student Teacher Relationship; Work Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Since women compose nearly half the labor market and are expected to continue to be a major component, the variables which affect women's career choices are of considerable interest. The effect of role models on attitudes related to career aspirations was examined for female college freshmen. Experimental subjects (N=75) were provided with role models through interactions with female faculty advisors and through exposure to female career women in an elective course about career exploration. During freshman orientation week both experimental and control groups completed the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEST), the Spence-Helmriech Attitude Toward Women Scale (AWS), an Occupational Status of Women Scale (OCC), and a Life Style Index (LSI). Posttests were administered at the end of the spring semester. Data analyses revealed a significant change in mean scores on all four attitudinal scales for the experimental group. The control group had significant changes only on the OCC and LSI. Exposure to role models, in particular female faculty advisors, had a significant effect on the women's self-esteem and sex role attitudes. The significant change in AWS scores suggests a less stereotypic attitude toward women's roles, which may result in a greater probability of choosing non-traditional careers. (NRB)

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INFLUENCE OF FEMALE ROLE MODELS ON CAREER-RELATED ATTITUDES

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CG 015751

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Influence of female role models on career-related attitudes

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Since women now compose nearly half the labor market and are expected to continue to be a major component, the variables which affect women's career choices are of considerable interest. Historically, women have been concentrated in a few professions, such as nursing and teaching, and grossly under represented in such male-dominated careers as engineering and mathematics.

Studies, such as the one by Rossi (1965), have indicated that women in non-traditional careers are more likely to have mothers who are professional, highly educated, and working outside the home than women in traditional careers. This phenomenon has been interpreted as the role modeling influence of the mother. Douvan (1976) also points out that a crucial older woman model is prominent in the biographies of a number of women successful in politics and academia.

Douvan (1976), in discussing women's professional development, states that the woman who wants to integrate a professional career with the traditional feminine goals of marriage and a family has a particular need of models. While a male teacher can be a professional model, a female model who has attained the balance of home and career may be "of pivotal importance in determining the outcome of her training and development."

Basow and Howe (1980) in examining the effects of role models on both males and females conclude that female models are particularly important for female college students in their career decisions.

Almquist and Angrist (1971), in discussing the function of role models, suggest that they function as a reference group, setting norms and values,

providing recognition for achievements, and orienting certain behaviors. Bell (1970) points out that role modeling includes two processes, interaction and identification.

The present study examined the effect of role models on attitudes related to career aspirations. Role models were provided for freshmen women in two ways - through interaction with female faculty advisors and through exposure to female career women in a course on career exploration.

The objectives of the project were as follows:

Objective 1: to provide specific information through lecture, discussion, and selected readings on careers for women.

Objective 2: to demonstrate the possibilities for competence, success, and job satisfaction for women in non-traditional careers and to provide role models for women students.

Objective 3: to ensure that women students are encouraged, through the process of advisement, to consider non-traditional course choices and subsequent career choices.

Subjects

Letters were sent to 135 randomly selected incoming freshmen women requesting them to participate in a career exploration project. Seventy-five agreed to participate and these constituted the experimental group. Letters were also sent to an additional 215 randomly selected freshmen students asking them to participate in a series of tests designed to

measure attitudes about careers for women. Sixty-eight responded positively and these students constituted the control group.

The women in the study ranged in age from 17 to 20, 65% of whom were 18. Seventy-three percent came from high schools with a graduating class of less than 480. Almost all came from public high schools. Almost half of them were Catholic.

Less than 50% of the fathers and 40% of the mothers had college degrees. The majority of the fathers were in professional, semi-professional or white-collar occupations. Approximately 2/3 of the mothers worked with 44% in full-time jobs. The majority of working mothers were in white-collar jobs.

Procedures

The students who agreed to participate in the project were assigned to nine female faculty members in the Arts and Sciences Division. Advisors were assigned on the basis of majors where possible. Undecided students were randomly assigned.

The students met with their advisors for the first time at registration, where they were assisted in choosing a course schedule for the fall semester. During the academic year students met with their advisors on a regular basis as much as possible. The goal was to try to meet with each student ten times a semester. The frequency of these advisement sessions were as follows:

No. of sessions	No. of Students	
	Fall	Spring
8 - 12	43	21
5 - 7	19	18
3 - 4	6	13
1 - 2	2	16
0	1	0

As can be seen, the frequency of interactions dropped during the second semester. It was the consensus of both students and faculty that such frequent interactions were no longer necessary. Overall, 90% of the students met with their advisors 6 or more times during the year, a frequency much higher than normal.

During the advisement sessions a wide range of topics were covered. Problems dealing with adjustment to college-life in the dorms, courses, study habits, etc. -- were discussed. In the area of career exploration, topics covered included personal strengths and weaknesses and their relationships to careers, occupations of parents, parents' attitudes towards their careers, and problems of working mothers and wives. There was also discussion of the material covered in the course during the semester students were enrolled in it. The subjects also were offered a course on career exploration which they could take either semester. The course included exposure to a number of female role models in a variety of careers.

Among the speakers were the president of a women's college, the highest-ranking woman in the State Department of Labor, a navy ensign, a cartographer, and a female sales manager for Xerox. We tried to bring in women at all levels and all ages.

Results

During freshman orientation week in the Fall both the experimental and control groups were administered the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEST), the Spence-Helmreich Attitude toward Women Scale (AWS), an Occupational Status of Women Scale (OCC), and a Life Style Index (LSI). The tests were re-administered during the last two weeks of the spring semester. In the fall demographic data and career goals were also gathered.

The most frequently cited reasons for going to college were: for a liberal education, for vocational goals, and for a better understanding of themselves and society. The students also thought these were the reasons their parents had for sending them to college.

Since one of the objectives of the project was the provision of role models, students were asked if they had role models prior to coming to college. The most frequently cited known-female role models were mothers, teachers, and older friends. The only known-male model cited with any frequency was their father. Among prominent people, both male and female, the most frequently cited were television and entertainment figures and political and athletic figures.

In terms of achieving their career goals, the most frequently cited personal assets were determination, getting along with people, and academic success or intelligence. The most frequently cited obstacles were shyness, personal relationships, and lack of endurance. The students saw themselves as equally or more attractive, intelligent, and ambitious as their male and female friends. In fact, 28% saw themselves as more intelligent than their male friends, and 39% thought they were more ambitious than the males they knew.

Attitudinal Data

Analysis of the attitudinal data collected indicated that there was a significant change in mean scores on all four attitudinal scales for the experimental group. For the control group there was no significant change over time on the Self Esteem Inventory and the Attitude Toward Women Scale. There were, however, significant changes over time on the other two scales. (See Table 4.)

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TABLE 2

Role Models of Students

Female Role Models Known to Student

Mother	- 19.8%
Teacher	- 18.9
Older Friend	- 17.1
No Answer	- 22.5

Male Role Models of Students

Father	- 24.3%
Teacher, Coach	- 5.4
Brother	- 4.5
Older Friend	- 4.5
No Answer	- 52.3

Prominent Role Models	Female	Male
TV, Entertainment	24.3%	27.9%
Political Figures	16.2	9.0
Athletic Figures	16.2	4.5
No Answer	36.0	52.3

TABLE 3

Career Goals and Aspirations

Career Goals	Age 6	Age 12	College
Housewife or mother	8.1%	1.8%	0%
Feminine career (e.g. teacher, nurse)	64.0	49.5	21.6
Masculine career (e.g. doctor, policeman)	12.6	31.5	28.8
Neutral (e.g. movie star, sales clerk)	9.0	9.9	21.6
No answer	6.3	7.2	21.6

Prior Experience

Volunteer work	- 62.2%
Full-time employment (3 mos. or less)	- 19.8
Full-time employment (6 mos. or more)	- 12.0
Part-time employment	- 84.7

Most Important Personal Asset in Achieving Career Goals

Determination	- 27.9%
Getting along with people	- 20.7
Academic success, intelligence	- 16.2
Ambition	- 5.4
Positive attitude	- 4.5
No answers	- 5.4

Greatest Personal Obstacle in Achieving Career Goals

Too quiet, shy	- 24.3%
Personal relationships	- 14.4
Lack of endurance	- 13.5
Finding right job	- 7.2
Poor grades	- 7.2
No answer	- 5.4

Compared to Friends	Male	Female
More attractive	10.8%	8.1%
Same degree of attractiveness	82.0	83.8
Less attractive	6.3	8.1
More intelligent	27.9	26.1
Same degree of intelligence	68.5	68.5
Less intelligent	3.6	5.4
More ambitious	38.7	46.8
Same degree of ambition	53.2	47.7
Less ambitious	8.1	5.4

TABLE 4

Mean Scores on Attitudinal Scales

Scale	Time of Test Sept. 1978	May 1979	Level of Significance of Change
Self Esteem Inventory			
Experimental	19.19	20.78	.009
Control	18.03	18.58	n.s.
Attitude Toward Women			
Experimental	59.17	61.57	.020
Control	61.97	63.83	n.s.
Occupational Status			
Experimental	70.90	74.40	.050
Control	73.03	75.48	.050
Life Style Index			
Experimental	7.87	8.64	.040
Control	7.30	8.96	.001

Note:

Experimental N=39
Control N=31

One of the objectives of the project was to see if the course and the advisement process had differential effects on the students. The experimental group was tested, therefore, at the beginning of the year, at midyear, and at the end. The group was then broken into three subgroups: (1) those who had the course in the fall, (2) those who had the course in the spring, and (3) those who had the advisement only. The course could not be required, only highly recommended. About 20% of the experimental group did not take the course.

Repeated measures analysis of variance indicated that there was a main effect for group only on the Life Style Index ($F = 3.379$, $p < .05$). On all other scales there was no effect for group, only time of testing. Those experimental students who did not take the course had a significantly lower mean score than the other two groups for all three times. The Life Style Index examines the conditions under which a woman expects to work. Low scores indicate a preference for staying home. Since the group was lower at the onset of the project as well as at subsequent testings, one could interpret these results as an indication of lower career commitment by these students and consequently less interest in the course. In fact, some of these students had registered for the course and then dropped it.

Examination of individual items on the Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory indicated that students in both groups saw themselves as dependable, assertive, and as having leadership qualities. Over the year both groups saw themselves as becoming more decisive. While the percentage of the experimental group that saw themselves "give in too easily" remained constant, the percentage for the control group increased from 33% to 46%. Again, while the percentage of the

control group that indicated they "got discouraged" remained relatively constant, the percentage for the experimental group decreased from 33% to 19%. (See Table 6 for comparative data on selected items.)

There were no significant differences in overall scores between the groups on the Attitudes Toward Women Scale and the Occupational Status of Women. However, there were significant shifts on particular items for the students in the project which seemed to indicate that they gained a more realistic attitude about the labor market. This was considered important since freshmen women were more naive than expected.

The Attitude Toward Women Scale (Spence and Helmreich) is an assessment of personal views of the role of women in society. Based on their responses, an overwhelming number of students in the sample felt that women should play an important role in the leadership of their communities, that men should share in household tasks, and that girls should have the same freedom as boys. One interesting inconsistency showed up. While 60% of the sample thought swearing and obscenity were more repulsive in women than men, only 20-25% felt telling dirty jokes should be mostly a masculine prerogative. Also, interestingly, while both groups remained relatively constant in their attitude towards sharing expenses on dates, the experimental group became more conservative towards women proposing marriage. Their agreement decreased from 80% to 70%. One other noteworthy shift was an increased expectation of the same freedom of action as men. The change was greater for the experimental group. (See Table 7.)

The second attitudinal scale administered, the Occupational Status of Women (Bingham and House), placed emphasis on attitudes towards women and careers. The students in both groups felt that women need more opportunities for employment.

TABLE 6

Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory*

Item	Agreement			
	Experimental		Control	
	Sept.	May	Sept.	May
1. I can make up my mind without too much trouble.	67%	78%	56%	74%
2. I give in too easily.	38	37	33	46
3. Other people usually follow my ideas.	74	72	76	79
4. I have a low opinion of myself.	18	17	24	15
5. If I have something to say, I usually say it.	79	83	61	69
6. I often get discouraged at what I am doing.	33	19	37	34
7. I can't be depended on.	4	2	2	6

*Selected Items

TABLE 7

Attitude Toward Women Scale*

Item	Agreement			
	Experimental		Control	
	Sept.	May	Sept.	May
1. Swearing and obscenity are more repulsive in the speech of a woman than a man.	59%	60%	53%	61%
2. Women should take increasing responsibility for leadership in solving intellectual and social problems of the day.	88	100	93	97
3. Telling dirty jokes should be mostly a masculine prerogative.	26	27	19	19
4. Men should share in household tasks such as washing dishes and doing the laundry.	97	100	95	97
5. A women should be as free as a man to propose marriage.	80	70	79	81
6. Women earning as much as their dates should share expenses when they go out together.	80	80	78	81
7. A woman should not expect to go to exactly the same places or have quite the same freedom of action as men.	31	7	26	14
8. The intellectual leadership of a community should be largely in the hands of men.	2	0	0	3
9. The modern girl is entitled to the same freedom from regulation and control that is given to the modern boy.	87	85	86	86

*Selected Items

However, 40% felt complete equality is unrealistic. Moreover, slightly more than half the sample thought working women feel guilty about leaving their children. About two-thirds felt that men find it difficult to marry women who are better educated than they are.

Some of the shifts are particularly interesting. Both groups over the course of the year changed their views towards the willingness of men to accept a female boss. At the end of the year 55% felt that men would not accept a female boss whereas at the beginning almost 80% did not think a female boss would be acceptable. The experimental group became somewhat more pessimistic about the labor market and, by the end of the year, were more convinced that women had to work harder and be more able than men to succeed in the male domain. They also felt that employers change job titles to discriminate against women. These changes are attributed to the course. At the beginning of the year the students naively assumed that most of the battles were won. After exposure to a number of speakers in a variety of fields, they had a much more realistic picture of the labor market. (See Table 8.)

The Life-Style Index (Angrist & Almquist) dealt with expectations for the future. The majority saw themselves as married career women with children. Not one student saw herself as a "housewife with no children." In both groups, there was a noticeable decrease in the number of those who originally expected to be a "housewife with children." In the control group there was an increase in the percentage who expected to be unmarried career women but this did not occur in the experimental group. (See Table 9.)

TABLE 8

Occupational Status of Women

Item	Agreement			
	Experimental		Control	
	Sept.	May	Sept.	May
1. No man really prefers a female boss	79%	55%	78%	55%
2. Women need more alternatives or employment than are currently available	82	95	95	95
3. Complete equality for women is unrealistic.	40	40	35	36
4. In general, women are less able than men.	13	2	4	5
5. Female college graduates need clerical skills as well as a diploma to get employment.	35	42	22	25
6. Working women feel guilty about being away from their homes and children.	52	55	59	64
7. In order to succeed in a field usually considered a man's domain, women must surpass men in ambition and intelligence.	63	80	74	86
8. Deep down most women don't want equality	27	27	26	14
9. Men find it difficult to marry women who have more education than they do.	70	64	63	69
10. Employers change job titles so they can pay women lower wages or salaries.	56	72	72	77

*Selected Items

TABLE 9

Life Style Index*

Item	Agreement			
	Experimental		Control	
	Sept.	May	Sept.	May
Fifteen years from now, would you like to be:				
1. A housewife with no children.	0%	0%	0%	0%
2. A housewife with one or more children.	10.9	2.5	21.7	8.8
3. An unmarried career woman.	4.7	5.0	2.2	8.8
4. A married career woman without children.	6.3	2.5	10.9	5.9
5. A married career woman with children.	76.6	87.5	63.0	73.5
6. Other	1.6	2.5	2.2	2.9

*Selected Items

Other Data

Students were asked again at the end of the year what they perceived as their biggest asset and biggest obstacle in achieving career goals (see Table 11). A comparison with responses at the beginning of the year shows some shifts in what students see as obstacles but there were no shifts for assets.

Thirty percent of the control group and 22.5% of the experimental group have already changed majors. However, since approximately 1/3 of the students are still undecided, these figures will change substantially.

Other Changes

Implications and Conclusions

Exposure to role models, in particular female faculty advisors, did have a significant effect on the young women's self-esteem and sex role attitudes. Interacting with the female advisors seemed to help the young women adjust to the college scene and begin to set goals. Examinations of individual items on the Self-Esteem Inventory indicated the young women saw themselves as becoming more decisive, assertive, and less easily discouraged.

The Attitude toward Women Scale is a measure of sex role attitude. The significant change in AWS scores indicated the development of a less stereotypic attitude toward the role of women, which should result in an increased probability of choosing non-traditional careers.

It seems reasonable to conclude the major factor in the changes was the advisement by the female faculty advisor. In this process there was frequent contact the student and involved a wide discussion of topics, ranging from career aspirations to personal problems.

TABLE 11

Students' Perception of Personal Assets and Obstacles*

Assets	Experimental	Control	Others**
Getting along with people	40.0%	21.2%	22.9%
Determination	15.0	30.3	20.0
Academic Success	12.5	15.2	20.0
Ambition	10.0	18.3	20.0
Obstacles			
Too shy, quiet	27.5	27.3	31.4
Lack of endurance	12.5	21.2	17.1
Finding right job	12.5	12.1	2.9
Lack of money for education	10.0	15.2	2.9
Personal relationship	7.5	0.0	22.9

*Responses at end of project.

**Students who took course but were not in original sample.

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